BRISTOL ROYAL INFIRMARY

1735 — 1912

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A Short History

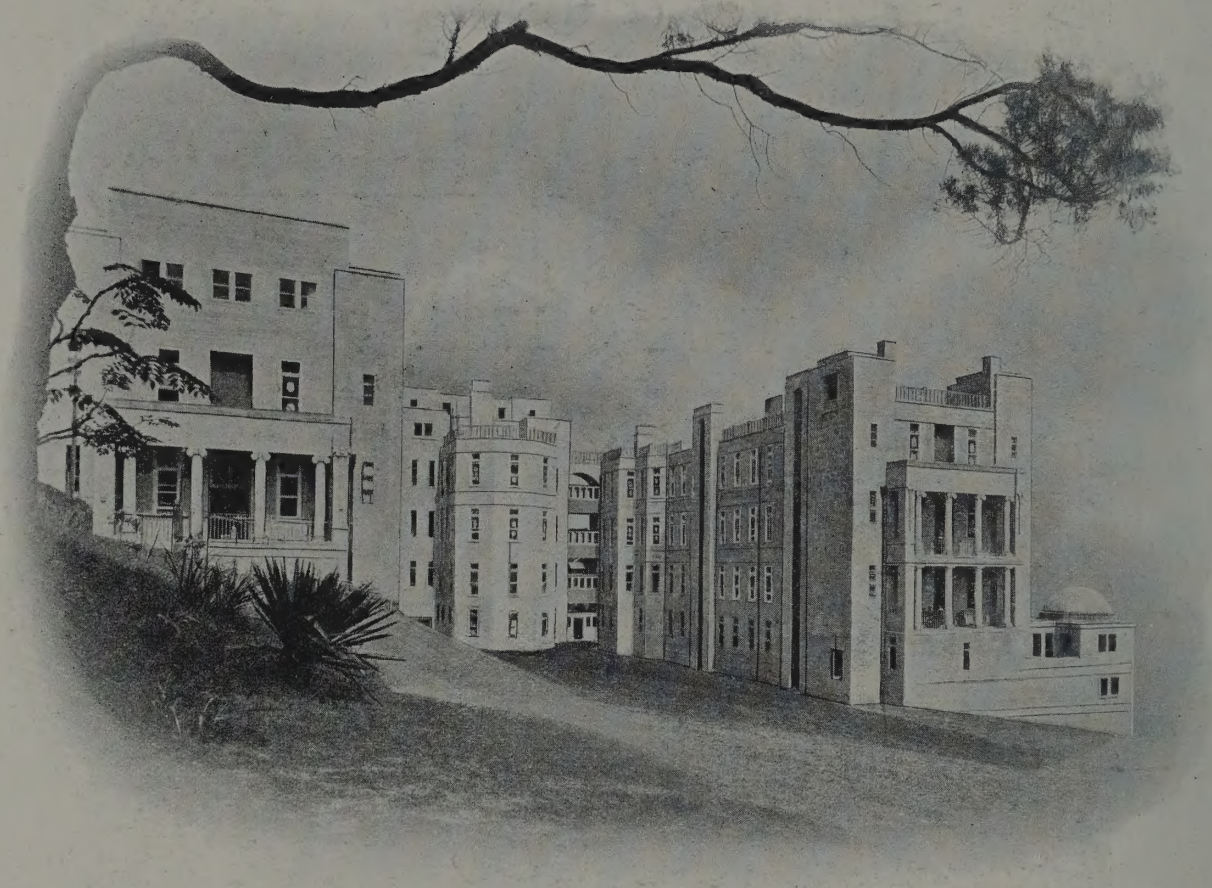
of the

Bristol Royal Infirmary.

Founded 1735.

CHARITY UNIVERSAL.

KING EDWARD VII MEMORIAL, OPENED BY HIS MAJESTY THE KING,
ACCOMPANIED BY HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN, JUNE 28TH, 1912.



Photo, F. Bromhead.

The New Infirmary.

The historical notes in this pamphlet and the photographs are taken, by permission, from "The History of the Bristol Royal Infirmary," by Mr. G. Munro Smith, which is shortly to be published.

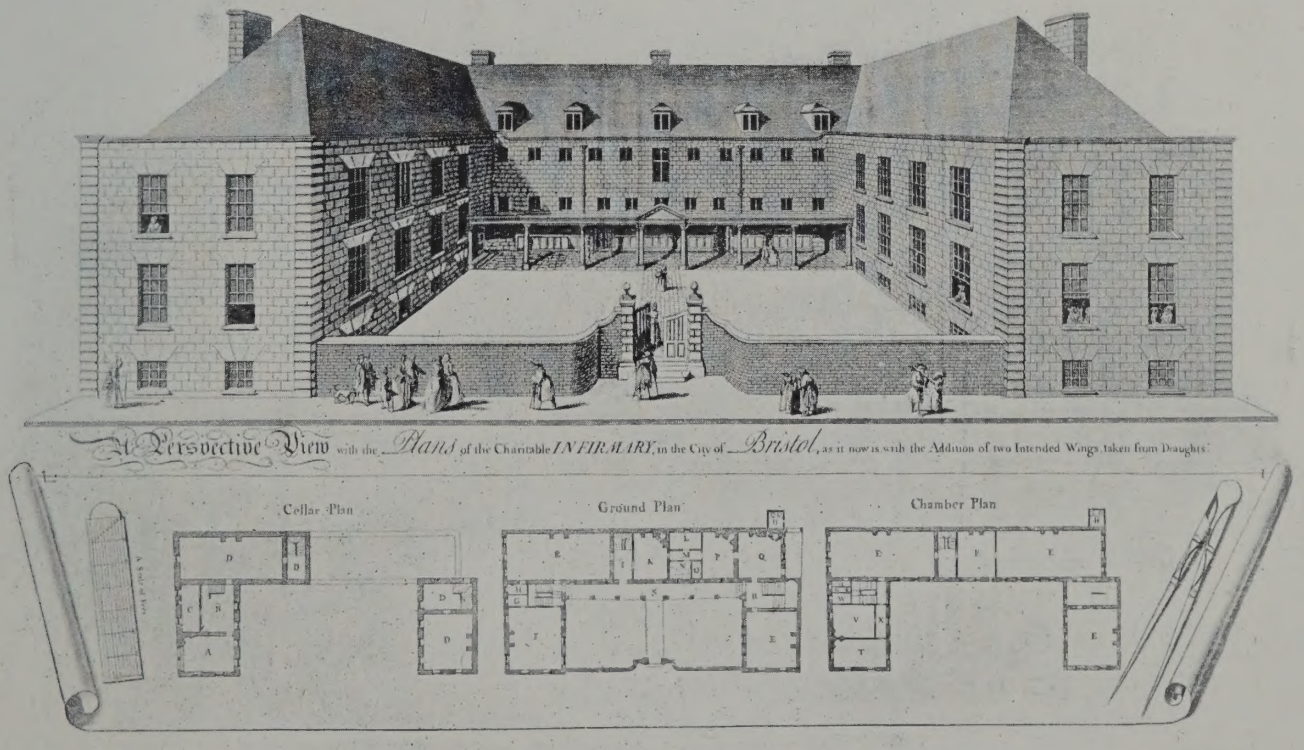
Photo, W. S. Stuart, Richmond.

IN MEMORIAM PERENNEM.

A Short History of
The Bristol Royal Infirmary.

IN the eighth year of the reign of King George II England possessed only five Hospitals for the treatment of her sick poor, and all of these were in London. In the second year of King George V the Metropolis can boast of twenty-seven and the Provinces of one hundred and sixty-six, not to mention Cottage Hospitals and those with less than thirty beds.

In the early part of the eighteenth century the miserable condition of the poor, especially in times of sickness, began to trouble the minds of men, and several additional Hospitals were built in London. The rest of the country, however, was neglected, until Bristol was stirred to action, and to her belongs the honour of being the first Provincial City to give this feeling of pity a practical form and found a Hospital supported by voluntary contributions.


A Persoective View with the Plans of the Charitable INFIRMARY in the City of Bristol, as it now is with the Addition of two Intended Wings taken from Draughts
Cellar Plan
Ground Plan
Chamber Plan

Plan of the first Infirmary.

(From an old print by Halfpenny.)

Towards the close of the year 1735 a number of citizens met together and entered the following resolution in a "large vellum book":—

> "Whereas many sick persons languish and die miserably for want of necessaries, who are not entitled to parochial relief, we whose names are under-written (in obedience to the rules of our Holy Religion), desiring as far as in us lies to find some remedy for this great misery of our poorer neighbours, do subscribe the following sums of money to be by us continued yearly during pleasure for the procuring, furnishing and defraying the necessary expenses of an Infirmary at Bristol for the benefit of the sick poor, who shall be recommended by any of the subscribers or benefactors in such a manner as the majority of them shall direct."

This was signed by seventy-eight persons, all promising sums from two to six guineas each.

A second meeting of these founders of the Bristol Infirmary was held at the Council House on January 7th, 1736, when the Mayor (Mr. John Blackwell), the Sheriffs (Messrs. Morgan Smith and Abraham Elton), John Elbridge (Controller of His Majesty's Customs), Dean Creswicke, and Sergeant Foster (the Recorder), were present, and many others, including Madame Trenchard, of Leigh Court, and Mrs. Susannah Heyler.

Mr. John Elbridge was elected Treasurer, and a general plan of management, by a monthly board of subscribers and a smaller weekly committee as executive, was arranged.

Some buildings formerly used as a brewery, and standing near the old site of St. James's Priory, were obtained, and the Committee proceeded at once to put them into repair. Owing to the munificence of Mr. John Elbridge, who spent at least £1,500 on the building (besides leaving £5,000 to the charity at his death), the interior was speedily converted into wards, with a Committee Room and an Apothecary's Shop.

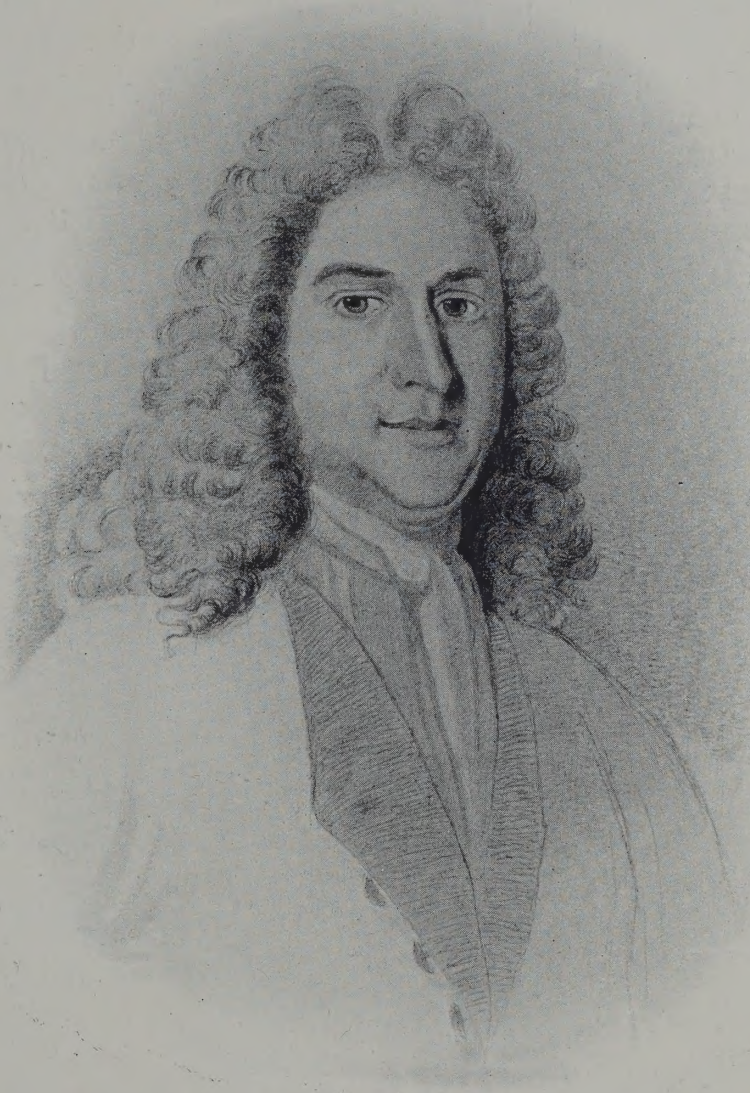
On May 20th, 1737, four physicians, viz. Dr. Bonython, Dr. Logan, Dr. Hardwicke and Dr. Etwell, and two surgeons, Mr. Thornhill and Mr. Thomas Page, were elected. Mr. Nathaniel Rumsey was appointed resident Apothecary and Mr. Morgan Smith Secretary.

Amongst these the names of Mr. John Elbridge, Sir Michael Foster and Dr. Bonython stand out prominently as energetic workers in establishing the Infirmary. Sir Michael Foster drew up the first code of rules, and gave his time and great legal knowledge freely to the new Charity.

On October 7th, 1737, Mrs. Anne Hughes was elected Matron.

On the 20th of June, 1737, the Infirmary was opened for out-patients, and on December 13th for in-patients.

At the opening ceremony subscribers were invited to "meet at the Infirmary at ten o'clock in the morning and to dine at the Nagg's Head." This was the first annual dinner, which afterwards became a civic ceremony, and one of the great yearly events in Bristol, with a procession of the Mayor



John Elbridge, first Treasurer of the Bristol Royal Infirmary.

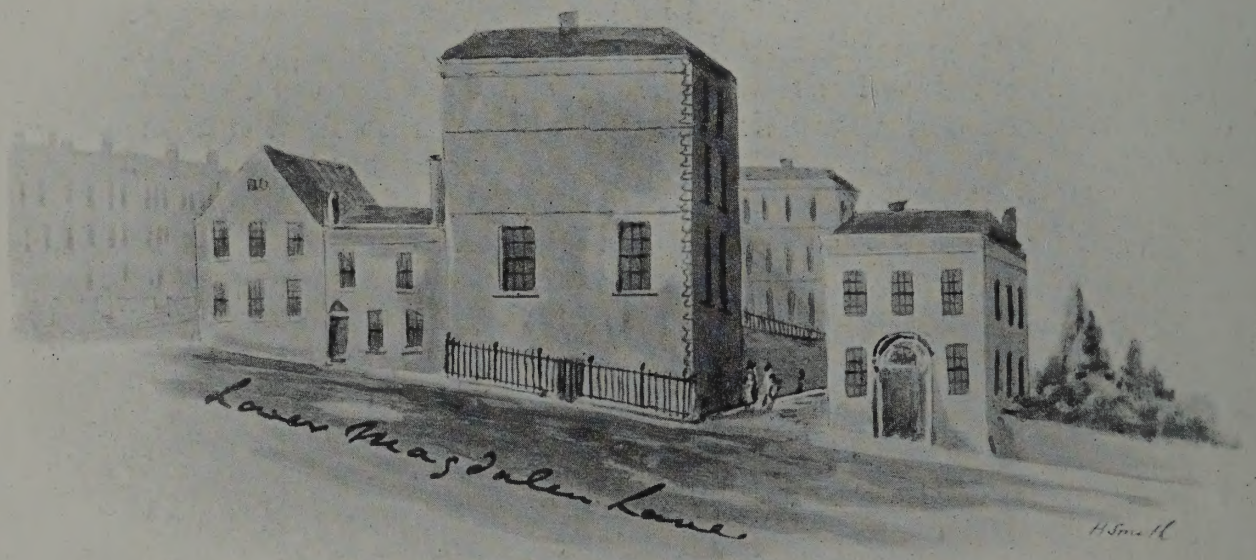
(*After the painting by M. H. Holmes.*)

and Aldermen to church, where a "Spital" sermon was preached. The company then adjourned to a tavern, where they sat down to a dinner, which usually lasted until late in the evening.

Such was the beginning of the Bristol Royal Infirmary, and such the energy and devotion bestowed upon it by all sorts and conditions of men. A long-felt need was at length supplied, and the citizens honoured themselves and the Charity by their zeal in its behalf.

The general charge of the building and of the patients and nurses was in the hands of the Matron, the purely medical part being under the care of the resident Apothecary. The Physicians and Surgeons attended daily. Visitors were also appointed, and kept a sharp look-out on the welfare of the patients.

During the first year one hundred and ninety-four in-patients and two hundred and thirty-two out-patients were treated. Of this total of four hundred and twenty-six it is said that "two hundred and forty-one were cured." It is interesting to compare these figures with those of the last year (1911), when four thousand seven hundred and twelve in-patients and fifty-six thousand four hundred and forty out-patients were treated. The nursing staff consisted at first of half a dozen nurses; at the present day there are one hundred and eighty-eight. The "Faculty" in those days numbered seven;



The west end of the Old Infirmary, built 1736–1750.

(From a water-colour sketch by Mr. Henry Smith.)

The Honourable Sir Michael Foster, one of the founders of the Bristol Royal Infirmary.

(*From the painting by T. Wills.*)

in 1912 forty-seven medical men are on the Staff, thirty-nine of whom are in regular attendance at the Institution.

This first Infirmary was soon found to be too small for the demands made upon it, and in 1739 additional rooms were built and furnished. In the following year a new ward was opened, and several necessary offices added to the establishment.

In the year 1749 the Infirmary consisted of a centre and one wing, containing six wards all properly equipped and furnished with iron bedsteads, and on September 5th of this year (1749) a new wing was begun, and for the first time the motto "*Charity Universal*" was painted in gold letters over the entrance. Many other alterations and additions were made, and under the guidance of different Treasurers the Bristol Infirmary carried on its benevolent work until the year 1782.

By this time the Institution was widely known and popular, and every week deserving patients had to be refused admittance for want of room. The wards were over-crowded, and Typhus, then called "Hospital" or "Gaol" Fever, frequently appeared. In fact, in the space of ten years four resident Apothecaries and one of the Physicians, besides several of the Nurses, died of this complaint.

It was decided, therefore, to destroy the old house and erect a new one, and in 1783 the work of demolition and rebuilding began. The new Infirmary consisted of a central portion and two wings, and the first stone of the east wing was laid on June 2nd, 1784; that of the central portion on June 24th, 1788. The west wing was not completed until the year 1814, so that the present Infirmary took thirty years to build.

The number of patients and the general usefulness of the Institution steadily increased. In 1830 it was decided to build an out-patient department at the back of the house, and in this way two rooms hitherto used for out-patients became available for ward purposes.

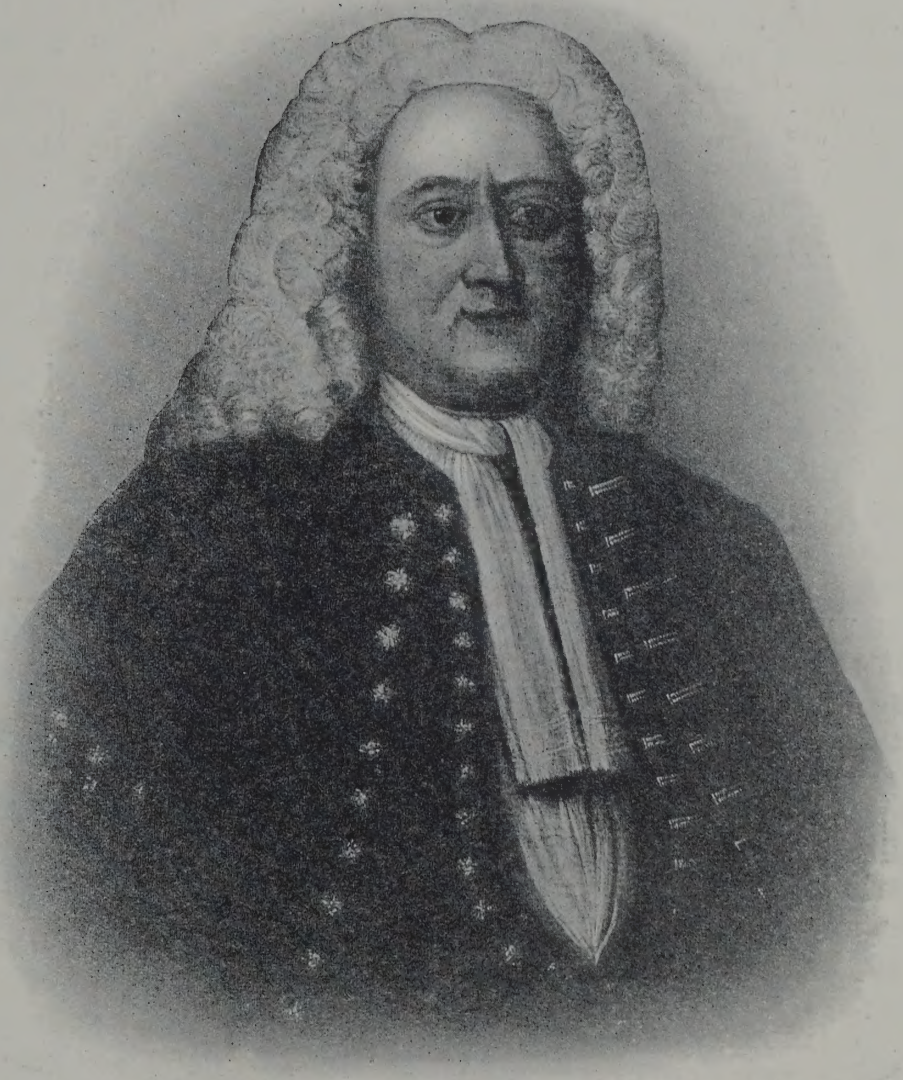
The marriage of Her Majesty Queen Victoria with His Royal Highness Prince Albert was considered an auspicious occasion on which to open these two wards. An appeal was made to the public, and on June 3rd, 1841, these wards, the "Victoria" and the "Albert," were formally opened.

In 1850 Her Majesty Queen Victoria gave the Committee permission to call the Charity the Bristol "Royal" Infirmary.

In 1859 a Chapel was built; this was due to the liberality and efforts of a former Treasurer, Mr. J. S. Harford.

The Museum, which was erected to contain the specimens left to the Institution by the two Richard Smiths and Mr. Lowe, was opened by the Senior Physician, Dr. Budd, in 1860.

In 1867 a series of dormitories was built for the Nurses; this necessitated the formation of a new story, which is now used for some of the Special Departments. The Nurses are now established in a well-appointed and commodious "Home" adjacent to the new Infirmary.



Dr. Bonython, first Physician to the Bristol Royal Infirmary.

On August 26th, 1869, two large wards, one of which has been used for children, were opened. They were built by the munificence of Mr. T. W. Hill, and called after the donor.

In the latter part of the nineteenth century three important fresh Departments were added, namely the Ophthalmic in 1885, the Dental in 1888, and the Obstetric in 1887. In connection with the last of these it may be said that poor women are attended at their own homes under the supervision of a Resident Officer, a Sister and trained Nurses, and the Obstetric Physician. In 1906 a Throat and Nose Department was formed.

Many useful Institutions owe their origin to the Bristol Infirmary. For example, the difficulty of dealing with those patients who require long-continued supervision, and are unable to attend as out-patients, gave rise in 1775 to the Bristol Dispensary, which was officered to a large extent by Infirmary Physicians and Surgeons, and was looked upon as an auxiliary to the larger and older Institution.

As might be expected, the Infirmary has been the centre of much of the intellectual life of Bristol. From its foundation members of the Staff have lectured on medical subjects, and in 1816 Dr. Prichard and Dr. Stock gave a long series of lectures intended to be the foundation of a Medical School.

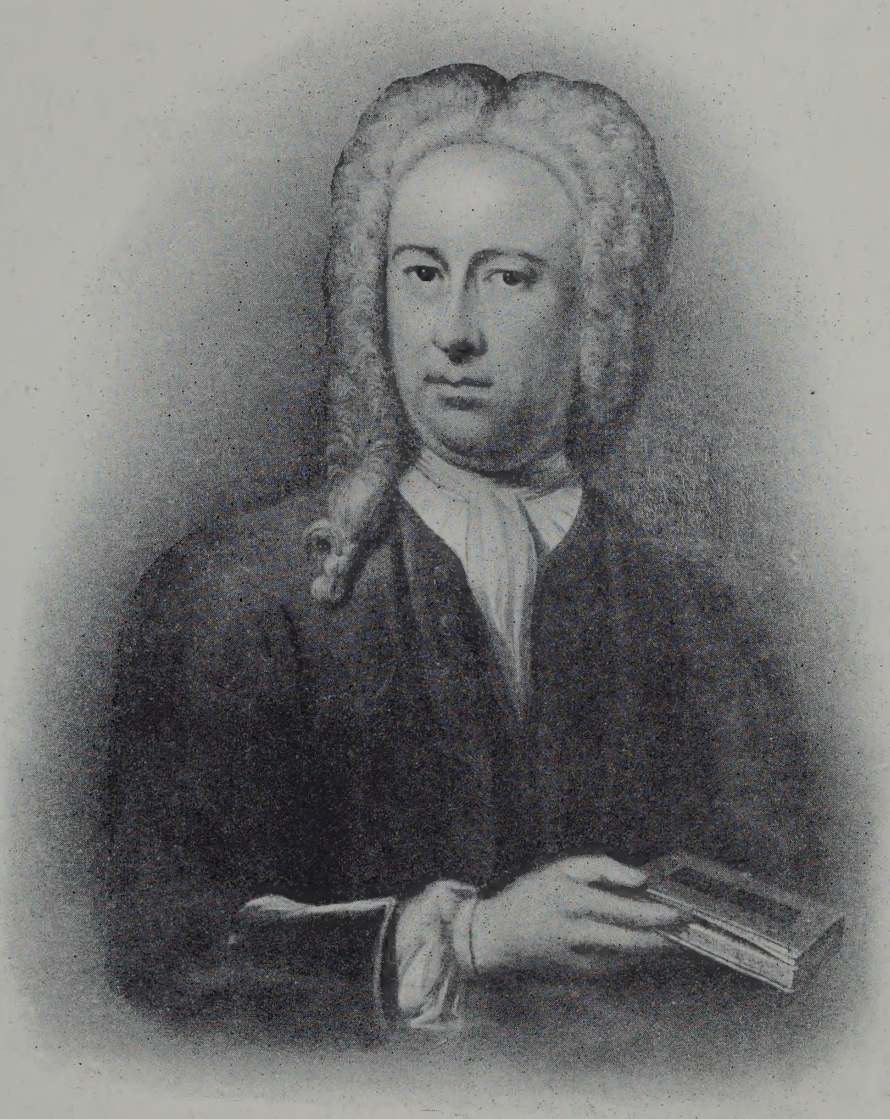
On the 10th of December, 1908, a large house in Berkeley Square was opened by Her Grace the Duchess of Beaufort as a preliminary school for training nurses previous to their entrance to the wards. This important and useful institution, initiated by the present Matron, Miss Baillie, is the only one of the kind in the provinces, and is doing excellent work.

By means of the Bristol Royal Infirmary Ladies' Needlework Guild, under the management of the Duchess of Beaufort and Lady White, the whole of the linen required for the Infirmary is annually supplied.

Of the illustrious men who have devoted their lives to the good of the Institution little can be said here. The names of William Budd, James Cowles Prichard, Edward Long Fox, John Beddoe, and Greig Smith have become universally known in the medical and surgical world; and many others, both of the past and present Staff, have become famous in their profession.

The Bristol Infirmary was one of the first institutions in the provinces to make use of the practice of anæsthetics and to adopt antiseptic surgery. With reference to the latter, it may be mentioned that Lord Lister was entertained at the Infirmary on the 3rd of May, 1880, and gave a practical demonstration of his system, which had for some years previously been practised in the surgical wards.

Since John Elbridge was appointed in 1736 seventeen Treasurers and Presidents have successively guided the destinies of the Institution. The present President and Treasurer, Sir George White, Bart., was elected in 1904, and at once infused new life and energy into the management. The sum of £50,000 was raised, the old debts were paid off, and a substantial nucleus was formed towards the cost of the new building. The work of the Institution



Mr. Thomas Page, first Surgeon to the Bristol Royal Infirmary.

rapidly developed. During the last eight years there has been an increase in the number of in-patients of forty-two per cent. and in out-patients of thirty-six and a half per cent. The increase in ordinary receipts has been twenty-seven and a half per cent., whilst the increase in ordinary expenditure has been seven per cent. only. The number of subscribers has increased from one thousand two hundred and seventy-two to three thousand four hundred and twenty-six.

There is, in fact, evidence of progress in all directions.

The addition of special departments, the great advances in surgical technique during recent years, and the necessity of keeping the Institution up to date in every way, demanded extensive additions and alterations. In 1910 the President and the Committee decided, after careful consideration, to build a new Infirmary, the first portion of which should be devoted to new Surgical Wards, Operating Theatres, and Casualty Department, from plans prepared by the Architects, Messrs. H. Percy Adams and Holden. The Committee were fortunate in their negotiations for the purchase of the large blocks of property immediately opposite the old buildings, and adjacent to the Nurses' Home. At the lamented death of King Edward VII, it was felt that it would be peculiarly appropriate that the new Surgical Infirmary should be a memorial to His late Majesty, and in June, 1910, the Governors resolved to dedicate these buildings to his memory. The King was graciously pleased to approve of the suggestion, and steps were immediately taken to proceed with the work. The foundation stone was laid by Sir George White, on March 14th, 1911, and "another important chapter in the long and magnificent history of the Bristol Royal Infirmary was inaugurated." The land acquired, in addition to the new buildings, provides about two acres of gardens for the Nurses and Patients. Some of the better houses on the property have been retained, to provide accommodation for extra nurses, as well as a Home for the preliminary training school formerly mentioned.

The old Infirmary was erected on land formerly belonging to St. James's Priory; the new King Edward VII Memorial Infirmary is built on the slopes once used as gardens by the monks, an open, sunny, well-drained and healthy situation.

Since the year 1736 fourteen Secretaries and House Governors have held office. Mr. W. E. Budgett, after ten years' service as a member of the Committee, accepted office as Secretary and House Governor in 1905, and has taken the active part in all these recent changes.

The history of the Bristol Royal Infirmary, from its humble beginning in 1735 to the completion of the present building, is the history of a great philanthropic endeavour. Many appeals have been made from time to time on its behalf, and the Bristol public has so far never failed to respond in a generous manner. Two-and-a-half millions of indigent and afflicted people have received help within its walls. This fact alone should plead more eloquently than any words to all who have any acquaintance or sympathy with the sufferings of the poor.

Photo, F. Holmes.

The Present Infirmary.

J. W. Arrowsmith Ltd., Bristol.